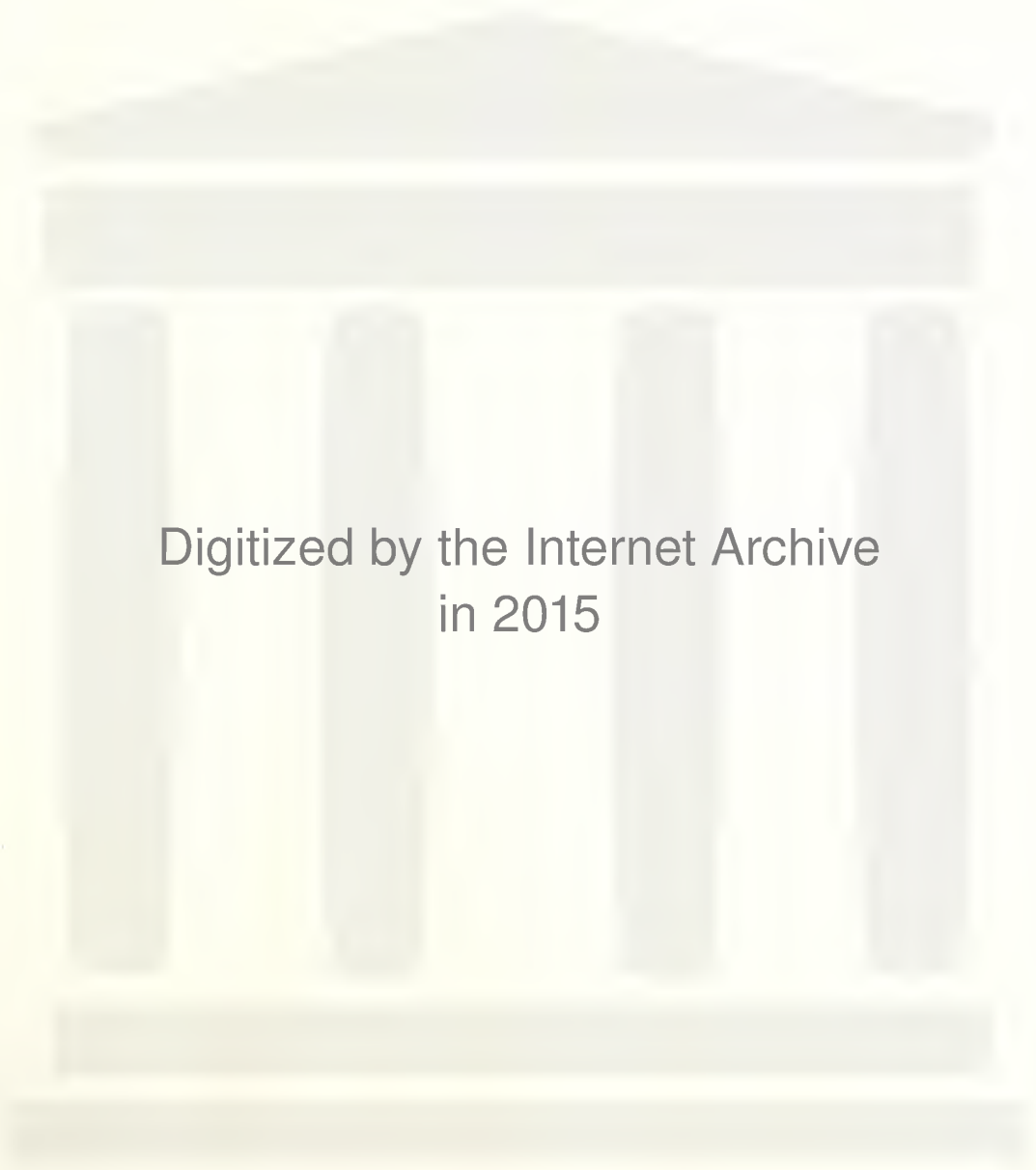




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A CHRONOLOGICAL SURVEY OF WORK
FOR THE BLIND

(With an appendix on the Prevention of
Blindness, and a Bibliography)

From the Earliest Records up to the Year 1930

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Published for the
NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR THE BLIND
GREAT PORTLAND STREET, LONDON

By
Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons., Ltd., London
1932

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CAPPADOCIA

FOURTH CENTURY

St. Basil established a "Hospital" for the blind at Caesarea in Cappadocia, and provided them with guides.

SYRIA

FIFTH CENTURY

The Hermit of St. Lymnaeus established a Refuge for the blind at Syr in Syria, special cottages being erected for their use.

FRANCE

SEVENTH CENTURY

St. Bertrand, Bishop of Le Mans, founded an Institution for the blind, believed to be at Pontlieu in the north-west of France.

FRANCE

ELEVENTH CENTURY

William the Conqueror, in expiation of his sins, it was said, founded among other institutions Hospices for the blind and other infirm persons, at Cherbourg, Rouen, Bayeux and Caen.

GERMANY

1178

Duke Welf VII established a Home for the blind at Memmingen, Bavaria, in which it is believed some sort of instruction was given.

FRANCE

1260

Louis IX, the saintly King of France, took under his protection an already existing institution for the care of the blind, which went by the name of L'Hôpital des Quinze-Vingts. The legend that this institution was built and endowed for his three hundred Crusaders, who chose to have their eyes put out by the Saracens rather than swear never to bear arms again against the Infidel, has been refuted by the researches of the Abbe Prompsault. He proves by ancient documents that the institution did exist, though its origin seems to have baffled inquiry, and Louis IX merely bought back the plot of ground in Paris on which it was built, which is proved by letters patent of June, 1260. King Louis also rebuilt the domicile for the blind and increased the number of pensioners to 300, and gave them an allowance of £30 a year from his privy purse on condition that this sum was used for making soup for the poor.

Begging was encouraged on the part of the inmates, to help support the Home.

BELGIUM

1305

A Hospice for the blind was established at Bruges.

LONDON

1329

The first Asylum for the blind in this country was founded by William Elsing, a London mercer. This was known as "Elsing Spittle" or "Spital". It stood near London Wall, and provided shelter for one hundred blind men. "It was confiscated," says Mr. Charles Pendrill, "at the Reformation, on the excuse that in the Middle Ages all hospitals were religious foundations." (See CONCERNING THE BLIND, by Dr. J.M. Ritchie.)

SWANSEA, S. WALES

1347

Death of Henry de Gower, Bishop of St. David's, who founded an asylum for the aged blind and sick at Swansea, which he endowed liberally with his own private property as well as with the revenues of three parish churches.

FRANCE

1350

King John the Good founded a Home for the blind at Chartres, similar to the one in Paris, but smaller.

BELGIUM

1370

A Hospice for the blind was established at Ghent.

LONDON

1467

The Company of Paynter-Stayners was incorporated by Edward IV. This old City Company, now known as the Worshipful Company of Painter Stainers, at the present day distributes about £10 a year each to two hundred blind persons, from Painters' Hall, E.C.

PRINT, RAISED

c. 1517

Early in the sixteenth century, Francisco Lucas of Saragossa, Spain, contrived a set of letters carved on thin tablets of wood. This is the first record of raised type for the blind. (See THE BEACON, January, 1924.)

LONDON

1528

The Fullers' Company, incorporated by Edward IV in 1480, and the Company of Sheermen by Henry VII, were united as one corporation by Henry VIII under the title of the Clothworkers' Company.

This old City Company, now known as the Worshipful Company of Clothworkers, distributes about £12,000 a year in pensions to the blind, including the Blind Man's Friend (Day's Charity) now administered from Clothworkers' Hall.

PRINT, RAISED

c. 1550

Girolimo Cardano (1501-1576) a physician of Pavia in Italy, conceived the idea that the blind might be taught through the sense of touch, and attempted to procure to some extent instruction for them. His NATURAL HISTORY mentions a device for teaching the blind to read and write by sense of touch, not very different from the modern invention of Braille.

KNITTING

Joan Wast, one of the four blind martyrs of England, maintained herself by knitting stockings. (See BLINDNESS AND THE BLIND, by W. Hanks Levy.)

PRINT, RAISED

c. 1575

Rampazetto, of Rome, taught blind people to read by means of letters incised on thin wooden tablets. The disadvantage of this system was that the letters were immovable, a fresh tablet was required for each page, and there was no means of duplicating.

ACT OF PARLIAMENT

1601

The Poor Law Act of Queen Elizabeth specifically mentions relief to be given, amongst others, to the destitute blind.

Prior to the Reformation, the poor, including the blind poor, were relieved through the activity of the monks.

After the destruction of the monasteries in the reign of Henry VIII, this mode of assistance necessarily came to an end, and was replaced, as soon as times became quiet and peaceful, by the Poor Law Act of Queen Elizabeth, which was the first statute enacting relief on national lines.

PRINT, RAISED

1640

Pierre Moreau, a notary of Paris, devised a system of movable raised letters cast in lead, and about the same time Schönberger of Königsberg, in Prussia, employed letters made of tin.

PRINT, RAISED

1651

George Harsdorffer, of Nuremberg, recommended the use of tablets covered with a coat of wax, on which letters could be formed by means of a stylus.

PRINT, RAISED

1660

Elizabeth Waldkirch was born in Geneva. She was a blind girl of remarkable intelligence, and her father and his friend, Bernouilli, the Swiss "savant," took a delight in teaching her.

Bernouilli had the alphabet incised deeply on a thin wooden board; Elizabeth traced out the form of the letters with her finger, then with a pencil, and by this means learnt to write correctly on paper with a pencil and even with ink. She learnt to speak and write Latin, French, and German, and kept up a voluminous correspondence with her family and friends in all three languages. We are also told she played several instruments, the violin, the flute, and the organ, with a delightfully vague "etc." at the end of the list!

PRINT RAISED

1676

Padre Francesco Lana Terzi advocated a kind of cipher code based upon a system of dots enclosed in squares or other figures, and further, an arrangement of knots tied in string.

SCULPTOR

c. 1680

Giovani Gonnelli (sometimes called Gambasius or Gambasio), who lost his sight at the age of 20, commenced work as a sculptor about 10 years later, and became well known for his work in Italy. ¹

YORK, YORKSHIRE

1717

Dorothy Wilson's Charity was founded by a bequest which provides eight annuities of £8, for blind persons resident in the city or suburbs of York.

LONDON

1718

In 1718 and subsequent years, the trusts known as "West's Trusts for the Blind" were created by John and Frances West, the funds being derived from various properties left to the Clothworkers' Company as trustees.

APPARATUS

1720

Nicholas Saunderson, blind from infancy, Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge, invented a board for working problems in arithmetic and algebra.

EDINBURGH, SCOTLAND

1721

Thomas Blacklock was born at Annan in Scotland; blind from infancy, he became a talented pupil at the Grammar School, studied divinity, and for a short time had charge of the parish church of Kirkcudbright. Later he became a school-master, and was keenly interested in the education of the blind. His example paved the way for the founding of the Edinburgh Institution for the Blind.

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¹Extract from BLINDNESS AND THE BLIND, by W. Hanks Levy (1872) in which book other mentions is made of sculptors and wood carvers.

OUNDLE, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

1723

John Clifton, by his will dated 1723, left £300 for two blind pensioners of Oundle. (The charity did not take effect till about 1785.)

APPARATUS

1756

Herr Weissembourg was born at Mannheim, Germany, in 1756; he lost his sight at the age of five. He was a bright, intelligent child, and his parents, being well-to-do, procured for him a tutor, Christian Niesen, who devoted all his energies to developing his pupil's ardent intellect. He taught the boy to write in French, as well as in his native German, improved on Saunderson's arithmetical table, and invented various contrivances for teaching his pupil algebra, trigonometry and geometry, for the boy had a marked talent for mathematics. The maps which the tutor prepared for his geography lessons especially excited the wonder of his contemporaries. In them the boundaries were marked in silk knots on the paper or cardboard on which the map was drawn, the rivers were marded in wire, the mountains by wooden pegs, the cities and towns by pins of varying size. Weissembourg was a very expert chess player; he taught a deaf and dumb man to play, and the two were ever afterwards constant, but friendly, opponents at the game.

PRINT, RAISED

1759-1822

Maria Theresa von Paradis was born in Vienna, 1759; she lost her sight when two years old. Her father quickly recognized his child's talent for music, and obtained the best teachers for her. She was taught to read by means of pins stuck into a cushion in the shape of the letters of the alphabet; when she had learnt their forms by passing her fingers over the pinheads, she was able to read when the writing was pricked through stout paper or cardboard. Herr von Kempellen invented a press for her, by means of which she printed German characters in relief. She early made her debut as a singer in church choirs, and was a skillful organist while still a child. The Empress Maria Theresa was a lover of music, and perhaps even more, of a child musician; she soon took a fancy to her little blind namesake, and gave her a pension of 200 gulden a year.

LONDON

1774

The Rev. William Hetherington, a Governor of Christ's Hospital, in the hope that his example would be followed, gave £20,000 to enable the Governors to pay annuities of £10 each to fifty aged blind persons. (The income in 1930 was £8,000, and the number of pensioners 514.)

LONDON

1777

Hugh Humston, by his will dated 1777, left a sum of money to provide pensions for the blind. The Humston Charity for the Blind, administered by the Aldgate Lordship Foundation, Whitechapel, E., provides pensions for five blind persons, who receive about £14 8s. each per annum.

PRINT, RAISED

1779

Death of a man named "Blind Jacob," at Netra, a Hessian village; he lost his sight when eighteen months old through smallpox. He reached a high standard of education by means of embossing characters on wooden staves. (See THE BRAILLE REVIEW, March, 1903.)

FRANCE

1784

Valentin Haüy founded, in Paris, the first School for the Blind--L'Institution Nationale des Jeunes Aveugles (Institution for young blind people). He was born in Picardy in 1745, and became the first great pioneer in the education of the blind.

The same year that the school was founded Haüy placed the first embossed books within reach of blind people, his pupil, Francois Lesueur, having discovered by accident the value of embossing on paper.



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